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ABSTRACT

The orthodox view of reading instruction has generally emphasized instruction in three areas: emergent reading skills, word attack skills, and the analytic study of literature. A more powerful and appropriate model for reading instruction would retain the emergent reading skills and word attack skills and divide the study of literature into hermeneutic study and personal study. By expanding reading instruction to allow opportunities for hermeneutic and personal study, students can more constructively use reading to make sense out of and gain greater understanding of their lives. Such an expanded view also recognizes that the background the students bring to their reading can energize the interaction between writer and reader. (Appendixes include 15 differences between skills and psycholinguistic approaches to reading and an outline of important philosophical considerations in extending a reader's reading.) (HOD)

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TOWARDS A NEW THEORY OF READING INSTRUCTION

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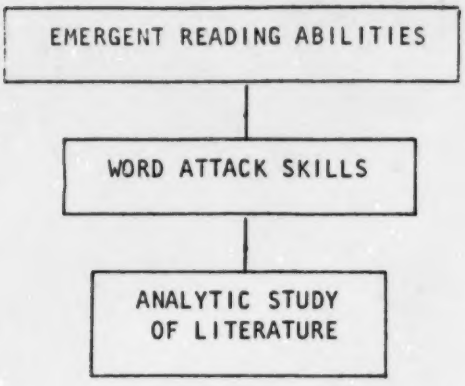
CS006581

TOWARDS A NEW THEORY OF READING INSTRUCTION

Literature is an important focus for an inquiry into the nature of man. Reading is the creative act that opens the vistas. Unfortunately, reading in our schools is generally boring, generally purposely redundant, generally taught with little regard for individual student interest, and almost never dealing with literature. In short, present orthodox reading instruction in the school is, to be generous, falling far short of where it could be. Furthermore, present reading theory is not capable of lifting reading practice from this rut.

Orthodox reading theory is essentially word or sound focused. We believe that such a focus is weak. In its place, we wish to build a reading theory that is human focused and that has, at its core, fundamental ideas, values, and activities of persons. As we look in schools, we generally see only three types of instructional reading activities. First, students are helped in learning what Holdaway (1979) calls emergent reading skills. Often these skills come under the title of reading readiness. Second, students learn skills that help them decode words. This second activity takes up most of the time spent in reading instruction within the context of the schools. Students are, at times, offered experiences in analytic study of literature. Generally, such study is confined to the upper or senior high grades. Here students may read poems like "Dover Beach", "Ode to a Grecian Urn", some of Barrett and Brownings Sonnets and some Emily Dickenson. They will also read, all students at the same time and probably at the same speed, authors like Milton, Shakespeare, Dickens, Boswell, Melville, and various neo-classicists. Certainly such study is appropriate, and we support the need for the liberal education that such reading helps to foster. But, such reading falls short. The typical model for school reading instruction would look like this:



While each phase of this "model" can be supported, we contend that this orthodox view of reading instruction does not move reading far enough. That is, we believe reading has a far greater potential than would ever be tapped in just these activities.

We connect reading with content (generally literature) and see literature as a bearer of many of the fundamental symbols and values that give cohesion to both individuals and groups. Certain literature transcends all social groups and attempts to speak to all humanity. The use of literature as a content for study opens up new avenues for human inquiry.

The power and the importance of literature to humans can not be too strongly stated. For example, Northrop Frye's new book The Great Code (1982) is a ten year work affirming the Bible as an essential code book of human thought. It's importance as literature and its influence on man can not be denied, Frye states. Literature, Kinneavy (1971) points out, provides us with a view of life through art. Literature, like art, is a creative enterprise. Authors of literature, like advertisers and rock groups, use a medium that allows them to accomplish a particular purpose. The recognition that literature exists because someone wanted to accomplish a purpose underscores the existence of meaning from the moment of its creation. In recognizing that literature is a medium, the notion of what reading is becomes clearer. Reading is an action on a particular medium-

-literature, or literary discourse. Literature must come before reading. If not, reading in terms of reading literature would be impossible.

The author has created the medium of literary discourse, Kinneavy suggests, in order to portray a view of life through art. Whose life is this view of? This question could be thought of as both practical and philosophical because at the heart of literature is a transcendence of experience that is both close and far removed from the practical affairs of our regular, human understanding. Think of your favorite author. Does she or he know you? Have you met and talked? And, if you have, have your conversations led this person to write a particular piece of literary discourse and dedicate it just to you? If so, you may certainly say, like Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, that this author wrote <u>just for you</u>. Few, if any of us, have had such power on infleunce with a particular author. However, we have heard people say that a particular author wrote "just for me." What did they mean?

Certainly none of the great writers of antiquity wrote for any of those of us alive today. Still, they have much to say to us. We have discovered personal and individual meaning from reading Aeschylus, Euripides, and Homer. We continue to learn, and teach, using Aristotle's category systems. They wrote "for us" though they never met us, and we can understand them and can come to know them even though we never spoke to them. Literature, all discourse that is literary, has the potential power to rise above the temporal limits that esoteric living places upon us. Literature gives us a view of life that transcends time, death, language, and physique. Aeschylus can tell us, personally, about Greek life. Furthermore, we can understand him and use our gained understanding to some advantage, all in spite of the fact that Aeschylus is dust and he hasn't spoken for thousands of years. The transcendent nature of literature, while so common to be almost ignored is so magnificently powerful that, when thought of, allows us to participate in an almost miraculous

communication. Thinking of literature as a medium useful for practicing reading skills, as an end in themselves, is tantamount to sacrilege.

Literature is far more than plot, characters, setting, genre, period, and so on as many of us dealt with it in school. As a number of students of language use (Britton, 1970; Kinneavy, 1971; Halliday, 1973) point out, literary discourse is a particular kind of discourse that performs a particular kind of task for us, different from the tasks performed by other types of discourse. In general, it provides us with a view of life - through the conventions of literary art. Because it is art, it has its own epistemology.

More specifically, Britton (1970) says that literary discourse makes us, not participants in life, but spectators of it. Atwood (1972) says:

> "A piece of art, as well as being a creation to be enjoyed, can also be (as Germaine Warkentin suggests) a mirror. The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in." (p.10)

To illustrate this point Atwood refers to the list Stephen Dedalus wrote inside the cover of one of his school texts in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

> Stephen Dedalus
> Class of Elements
> Clongowes Wood College
> Sallins
> Corenty Kildare
> Ireland
> Europe
> The World
> The Universe

This list includes any level or scope of life that it is possible to read about. While the first line refers to the personal level and the last line or two refer to a universal level (the two levels at which we usually discuss literature), all the middle categories refer to levels that could be called social, cultural, regional, or national. While different literature may emphasize different levels,

it usually includes all levels. Thus Faulkner's work deals with the personal and universal levels, but it also supplies us with a mirror in which we see aspects of the American South. In a similar fashion the stories of John Cheaver provide us with insight to a suburban upper-middle class New England world.

Thus, when readers read literature, they seek meaning in their own lives. From the text (mirror) they learn about themselves (personal and universal levels) and the world they live in (regional, culture, national levels). The metaphor of the onion has been used to describe the coming to understand literature, suggesting that the reader peels off one layer after another to arrive at a deeper meaning. While this view may be an orthodox, analytic view, it may not be appropriate to understanding literature. A more appropriate metaphor would have to talk of the building of layers of meaning from a variety of knowledge sources instead of the stripping off of layers. Reading literature is holistic rather than compartmentalized.

A cornerstone and a reason to read is the growth that the reader experiences. Reading is synthesis, not only of past experiences but also of the content of the literary material being read. Walter Kaufmann (1958) in Critique of Religion and Philosophy states:

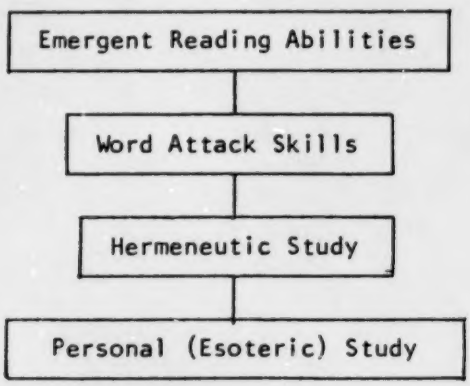
> "In the study of art (including literature), religion, and philosophy, we ourselves are the clay, and the biggest question is what becomes of ourselves. (p.406)

We are formed by literature because literature tells us about ourselves and the world. One of the major ways that literature does this is through the values reflected in it. Literature always deals with a problem or issue. For example, Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath deals with the problem of social injustice and a children's book such as E.B. White's Charlotte's Web deals with the issues of death and friendship. The problem or issue dealt with in the literature is viewed in a certain way by the author, i.e., the author makes a decision about it. This decision is made on the basis of what the author knows about

the issue (knowledge) and how the author feels about it (values). These values reflect the author as an individual, but also as an inhabitant of a region, a member of a cultural group, a citizen of a nation, and a member of the human race and thus holds up a mirror to us as human beings who belong to a particular culture and nation. This decision about an issue made by an author on the basis of his or her values is also called the theme of the story. For example, we can contrast the views (i.e., values) of Camus and Cervantes on life and death, the views of Sartre and the Romantics on love, or the views of Anglo-Saxon and native North American cultures on the relationship between man and nature.

While literature can be encountered orally (as when someone reads it aloud to us) or visually (as when a book is made into a movie), we usually encounter it in print and must read it. As educators concerned primarily with developing students' reading ability, we must look finally at how reading fits into the perspective developed so far. Because literature is important as a way of knowing, reading must focus on more than words and skills. Reading must focus on human meaning.

We envision a more powerful and appropriate model for reading instruction in the schools. It can be shown as follows:

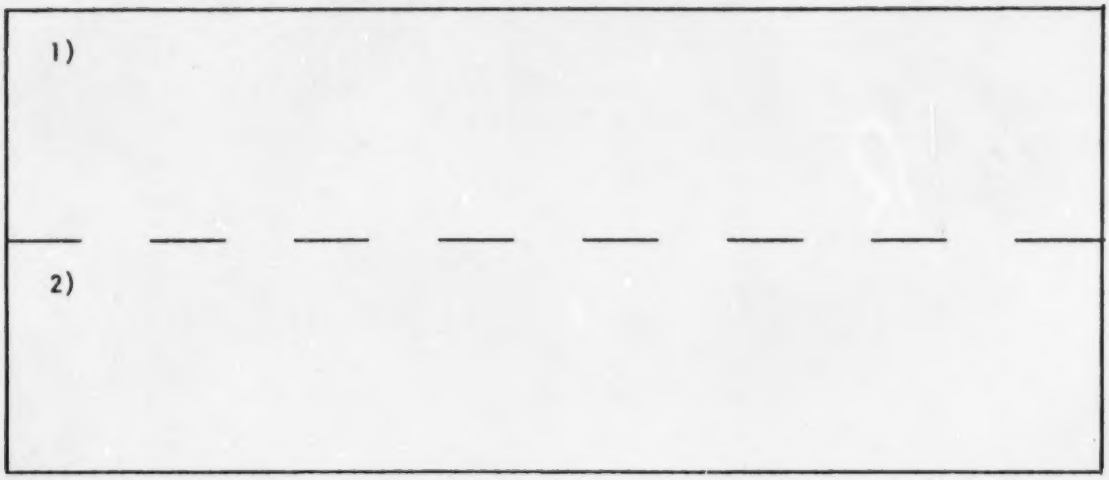


Both of the first two categories of the model remain important and would be considered in our theory. However, we would expand the model by adding hermeneutic study and personal (esoteric) study. We use the terms hermeneutic

in the classical sense of analytic interpretation. For example, using a novel like The Tale of Two Cities can give students insights into the events, feelings, sex roles, and interactions between social classes during the French Revolution. Hard Times, also by Dickens, would give us an insight into the social effects of the Industrial Revolution in the later 18th Century. Personal (esoteric) study results from the understanding that, when people read, they understand things in different ways because they have different backgrounds, ideals, priorities, and experiences. If, for example, a person is a teacher, he reads all literature at least in part as a teacher. He may see power relationships as analogies to school life, he may view environments and activities like those he knows, and he may see interactions within literature as expressive of interactions with students. In such a way, reading is truely creative. The writer and the reader combine to create something that, in a real sense, has not been created before.

We contend that by expanding reading instruction to allow opportunities for hermeneutic and personal (esoteric) study, students can more constructively use reading to make more sense out of and gain greater understanding of their lives and the social context of their lives. As an example of this personal (esoteric) extension, let me offer this almost obscure paragraph from the introduction of the book The Protestant Mystics by W.H. Auden (1964). Before you (the reader)go on to the rest of the paper, we would ask you to read the paragraph and briefly write what the paragraph means to you in the space marked #1 (on page 8).

> To see this is to realize, first, that no power on earth can compel men to love; it can only compel them to conform till it is overthrown; all legislation and coercion, however necessary, has a negative function only; respectability can be a consequence of habituation, though not for long; love never becomes a habit. Second, there is no perfect *form* of society; the best form can only be the form through which at any given historical moment or in any given geographical location, love for one's neighbor can express itself most freely, *i.e.*, it is a practical not an ideological matter. There can, for the Christian, be no distinction between the personal and the political, for all his relationships are both; every marriage is a polis, every imperium a family; and he has to learn to forgive and sacrifice himself for his enemies, as for his wife and children.



If I (Parsons) may, let me offer a little background for this paragraph. A great portion of my present job involves the teaching of those involved in student teaching in junior high schools. Certainly, one of the biggest problems in junior high school is discipline and/or classroom management. As I read and think, the topic is often on my mind. And I often wonder, as a teacher of teachers, what I can say to give aid in this difficult area. Now read the paragraph again, this time thinking what it might say about classroom management.

If you (the reader) are like most of those readers who are also teachers, you will gather advice about classroom management from this brief paragraph. This advice may either encourage you or it may disgust you -- you may agree or disagree; but, usually, you will catch the advice. Is the advice cryptic? No. It is simply not there until a reader applies a shared esoteric background (as a teacher interested in classroom management) that you can see Auden giving advice to the teacher.*

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*Auden's advice would be something like: You can't make students conform to your wishes as a teacher by rules or by brute force. Force may work for a short time, but they soon will rebel. There are no answers carved in stone. Students must come to believe in the importance of the activity, or the educaction, if true order is to be established; and, a teacher must be willing to bear the scars of the job.

While Auden was widely published, particularly as a poet and a literary critic, I have yet to come across any writing by him particularly for teachers. Yet, for many people the message exists and it is truthful. He has interacted with a teacher in a way, we suspect, he would not have imagined and about a subject, we suspect, he would not have imagined. The background people bring to their reading is able to and does energize the interaction between writer and reader. Quite simply, a person who is not a teacher would, in all probability, not understand Auden's advice to teachers.

Mature, adult readers are not alone in their dependence on background experience to help them understand fully a written passage - even a very simple one. Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan's new book On Learning to Read argues that children are intelligent, active, and subjective interpreters of their own experience. Most reading "mistakes" have less to do with a child's skill deficit than with that child's subjective interpretation of a text they state.

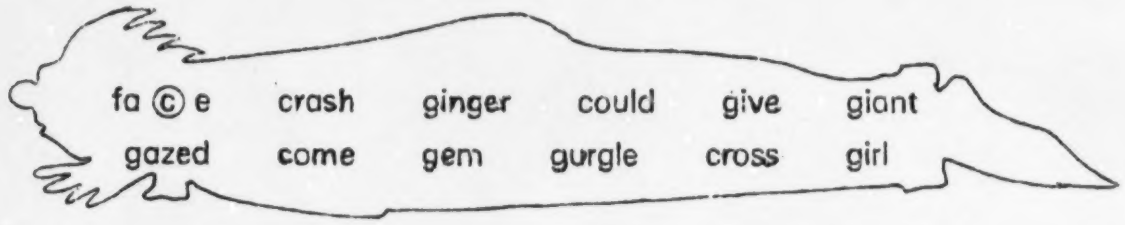
For sake of our point, let's assume that Bettelheim and Zelan are correct. Look at the following worksheet -- photocopied exactly as it came home from school. What is there to notice?

My daughter, Kerry (in Grade 2) is being asked to distinguish seasons of the year in part B. Answer #2 is marked incorrect. Why? One of two things has probably happened. Most likely the teacher has learned that in spring the heavy rains (showers) promote the growth of vegetation (bring May flowers). Or, it could be that page 30-31 of the 1978 Teacher Resource Book has an answer key that suggests spring is the correct answer... at least, fall is not the correct answer. (Folk wisdom suggests spring as the correct answer.) The logic of spring as an answer is doubtful if, indeed, spring is the correct response (either spring, summer, or fall could probably be a correct answer in Edmonton, Alberta). Edmonton gets about 11"-14" of percipitation per year most of which, in the form of rain, comes in July - summer.

Kerry

Phonics 107, 109

A. Draw a ring around every soft [c] or soft [g].



B. When do we do it? Winter, summer, spring, or fall?

1. We swim. Summe
2. We wade in puddles. fall
3. We ski. winter
4. We make snowmen. winter
5. We rake leaves. fall
6. We plant a garden. _____

C. Who did it? Mac, Pinky, Tim, or Tim and Pinky?

1. Who went to the top of the hill? _____
2. Who were standing at the bottom of the hill? _____
3. Who was afraid to look? _____
4. Who fell flat on his back? _____
5. Who was wearing dark goggles? _____
6. Who said, "Mac is down"? _____
7. Who was the fastest thing on the hill? _____

*D. Find the right word to finish the sentence.

1. Winter is to snow as summer is to _____.
2. Crow is to bird as cow is to _____.
3. Goggles are to eyes as mittens are to _____.
4. Book is to read as song is to _____.
5. Wind is to blow as sun is to _____.

Let me trace a possible thinking process for Kerry and see if it might hold water. (An important bit of information is that this worksheet was completed in December.) The child is faced with a question; "When do I wade in puddles?" To answer this she probably tries to recall her own experience asking "When have I waded in puddles?" "Ok" she answers, "I remember wading in puddles on my way to school." (The bulk of children's unsupervised walking when they would most likely wade in puddles, is to or from school. I would tell Kerry to stop walking in puddles if she were with me; so would my wife.) So the child says to herself. "Ok, now. The last time I waded in puddles was on my way to school. Yes! It was this school year -- I was in Grade 2. That started in September, September is in the fall. Fall must be the right answer." Is this plausible? Sure.

So, Kerry writes down fall. The teacher grades it wrong. What are some possible implications? First, Kerry might begin to doubt her own background experiences as suitable criteria for answering educational questions. If her answer is not correct, and she continues to strive for correct answers, she is now obligated to guess what the teacher's or the book's correct answer is. Education is not an understanding of experience but rather a calculating of a "correct" answer. Kerry may be becoming programmed into a system where decoding the right meaning is the primary goal of reading.

The previous illustration suggests a subtle manipulation of the learner towards an understanding that meaning and experience lie in the text itself and that a reader's task is to unscramble the text. Such is one view of reading, based on a particular philosophical stance that touches not only reading but also the nature of children, the nature of education and school, and questions about authority, power and control. The idea that students depend on background to understand a text and interact with an author is stated continually. But, the question is as much philosophical as it is descriptive. Do readers (the

students) have the ability, rights, and powers to use their own background or do they not? In looking at orthodox reading practice in the schools, based largely upon decoding textual material, the indication is clear to us that many reading programs do not believe in the abilities and rights of children in this area. (See Appendix A.)

The push toward a new theory of reading instruction is not the push towards a radical new process. It is, rather, the push toward a radical new attitude.* This attitude calls for a reaffirmation of the centrality of literature in reading; a reaffirmation in the power, ability and rights of readers to create meaning; a reconceptualization of how the esoteric reader interacts with the esoteric writer to create an inter-active meaning, and finally, the power of literature as art to help humans understand themselves and the world.

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(See Appendix B.)

APPENDIX A

15 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SKILLS' APPROACHES AND PSYCHOLINGUISTICS' APPROACHES TO READING

In order to show the differences between the two philosophies and to help teachers, and others, be more critical about certain reading approaches, the following basic distinctions are outlined. While no distinction is probably sufficient to label a person or an approach either skills-oriented or psycho-linguistics-oriented, the distinctions added up would give a strong indication of philosophy.

CONFLICTING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT READING

SKILLS APPROACHES	PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACHES
1. All students are pursuing the same goals in reading. The kind of content that students read is not of prime importance.	1. Students have different values and different reasons for reading. Providing all students with the same content would not be appropriate.
2. Students will read content and use the "facts" of the content to alter what they know. The "facts" will be the same for each student.	2. Students will use what they know to interpret and understand the "facts". The "facts" will be different for each student, based upon the student's background.
3. Reading "problems" can be treated best by being broken down into small pieces.	3. Reading "problems" are complex and hardly even can be treated in small pieces.
4. Learning is additive. People add little piece upon little piece to gain meaning.	4. Learning is radical and involves change in the learner's attitudes and in the relationships between things known.
5. In reading and learning to read, good technique is central.	5. In reading and learning to read, the reader is central. Technique varies.

6. Readers are generally passive receivers of information.	6. Readers are active interpreters of information.
7. Reading problems are best diagnosed and treated by reading experts.	7. Reading problems and solutions are best framed by the readers themselves.
8. Growth results from the systematic elimination of a reading "deficit".	8. Growth results from a new creation of meaning on the part of the reader.
9. There is a right way to read, the task of the expert is to find that right way.	9. There is no right way to read. Reading "style" depends upon circumstance and child.
10. In reading remediation, instruction is specifically related to the reading difficulty.	10. Reading instruction is only as specific as the learner. In other words, there is generally no specific reading instruction for each reading "problem".
11. In reading instruction, there is a tendency to ignore experience. It gets in the way of instruction.	11. In reading instruction, there is a tendency to place experience at the centre. Instruction can not get past a reader's experience.
12. The literature and knowledge about reading instruction is written in propositions and systems.	12. The literature and knowledge about reading instruction is written in parables and aphorisms.
13. The reading process is important because of how it happens.	13. The reading process is important because of what it means.
14. Reality and truth comes in chunks and pieces.	14. Reality and truth exist in context with life.
15. The reader comes to reading empty.	15. The reader comes to reading full.

You may want to use the list above as a check on your beliefs and actions in teaching reading. If most of your beliefs about reading fall on the left-hand side, you are probably safe in using any reading series. If, however, most of your beliefs fall on the right-hand side, you may want to consider the material you are using.

APPENDIX B

Important Philosophical Considerations in Extending Reader's Reading

Preface: The focus on "meaning-centered" reading as opposed to "skills-centered" reading is as much a philosophical attitude as a systematic "thing-to-do". The following are important philosophical attitudes:

About Students:

1. Students do and will continue to have different reasons for reading. [Implication: It is not always appropriate to provide the same content for readers nor to expect them to enjoy the same content.]

2. Students will use their background to interpret what they read. [Implication: It is not always appropriate to expect students to understand the same story in the same way. The "facts" will be different for each student.]

3. Students are generally the best people to diagnose their own reading problems, since they tend to understand their difficulties subjectively. [Implication: There is generally no specific reading solution for each reading "problem". Each solution depends on the student, the material, and the circumstances. Ask.]

About Reading "Problems"

1. Reading "problems" are generally complex. [Implications: Problems can not be "treated" in small pieces by prescription and cure.]

2. Reading "problems" are generally reader centered. [Implication: Good technique will not solve most reading problems, since technique varies from reader to reader.]

3. Reading "problems" may be interpretive in nature rather the deficit in nature. [Implication: "Filling kids up" with skills may not solve the "problem".]

About Teaching

1. Good teaching probably rests as much on good experience as it does on good textbook knowledge. [Implication: Live and learn.]

2. Teaching can be lonely. Lonely teachers are not always the best teachers. [Implication: Talk and learn.]

3. For all of us, it is easy to believe that what we believe is the sum total of human existence. It may not be. [Implication: Think, be critical, and learn.]

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